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Insights into hours worked, May 2021

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Source: [Labour Force, Australia, May 2021](#)

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With many hours worked series returning to their pre-COVID levels, the ABS is planning to cease publishing this article on a monthly basis after the May 2021 issue (on 17 June 2021). The ABS will continue to monitor changes in hours worked and provide additional analysis when relevant.

Hours worked and employment

Hours worked increased by 1.4% (in seasonally adjusted terms) between April and May 2021, while employment increased by 0.9% or 115,200 people. This rise in seasonally adjusted hours worked in May followed a decrease in April (-0.7%), with a larger number of people than usual taking leave over the Easter holiday period.

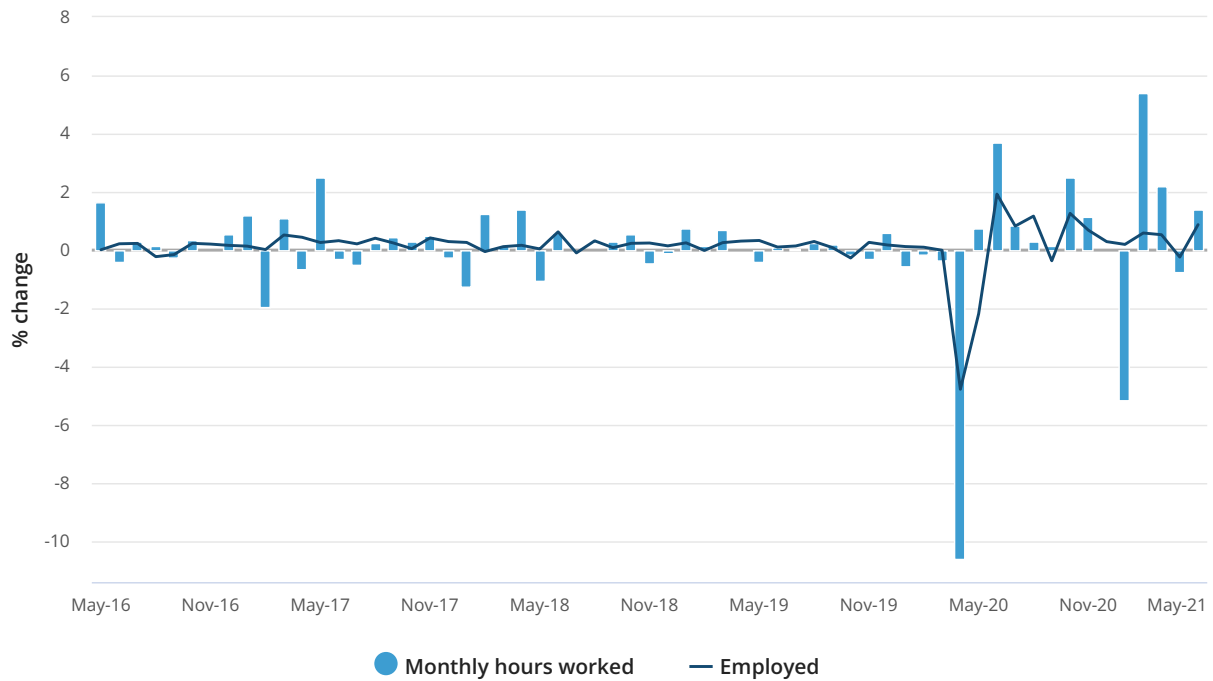
Chart 1 shows changes in hours worked and employment, indexed to March 2020, while Chart 2 shows monthly changes in hours worked and employment since May 2016.

Chart 1: Hours worked and employment index, Seasonally adjusted (March



Source: Labour Force, Australia Tables 1 and 19

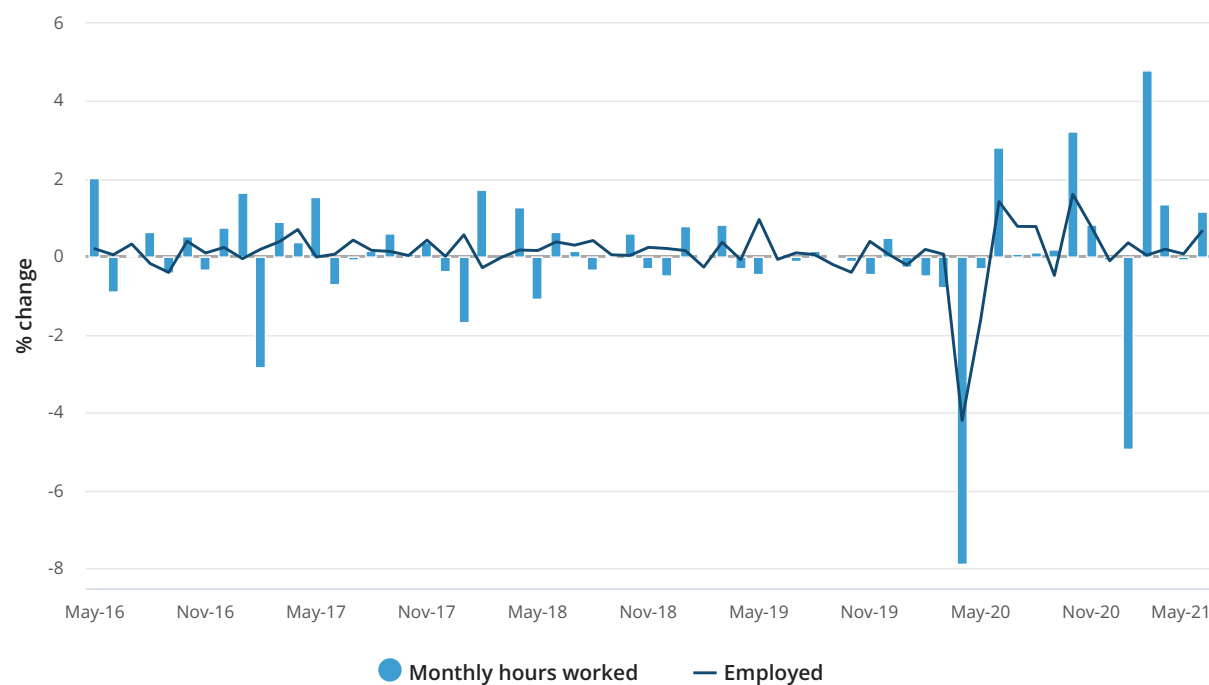
Chart 2: Monthly change in employment and hours worked, Seasonally adjusted



Source: Labour Force, Australia Tables 1 and 19

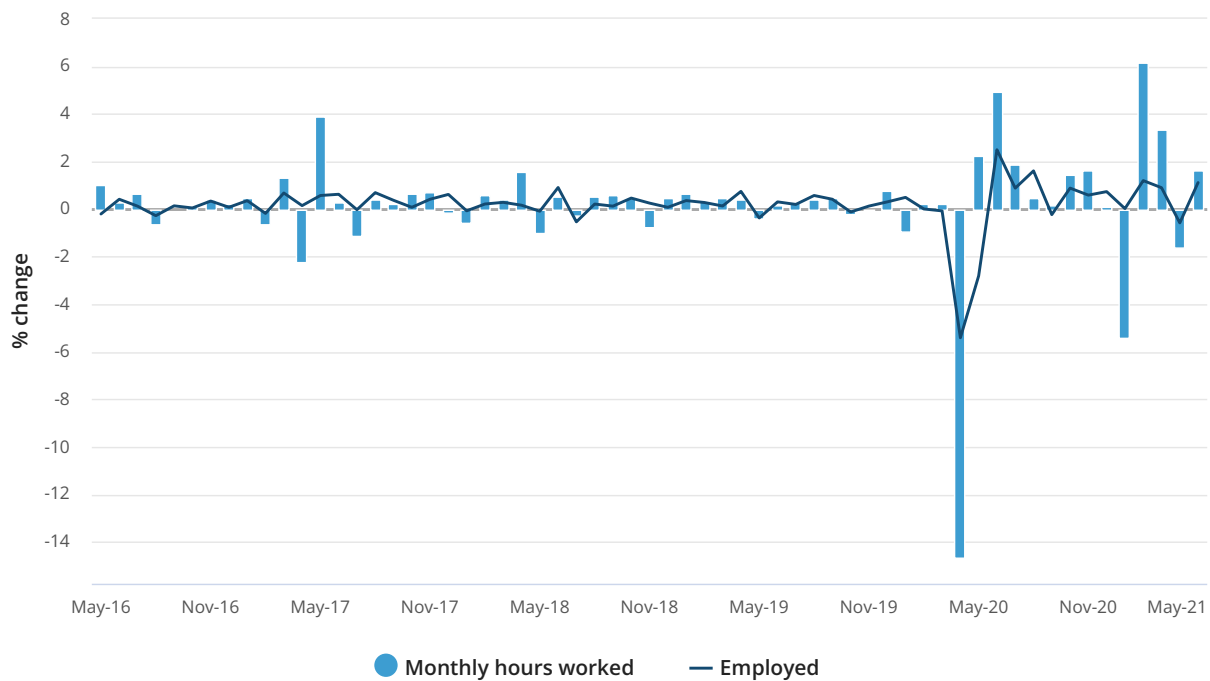
Changes in employment and hours worked for men and women

Table 2a: Monthly change in employment and hours worked, Males,
Seasonally adjusted



Source: Labour Force, Australia Tables 1 and 19

Table 2b: Monthly change in employment and hours worked, Females, Seasonally adjusted



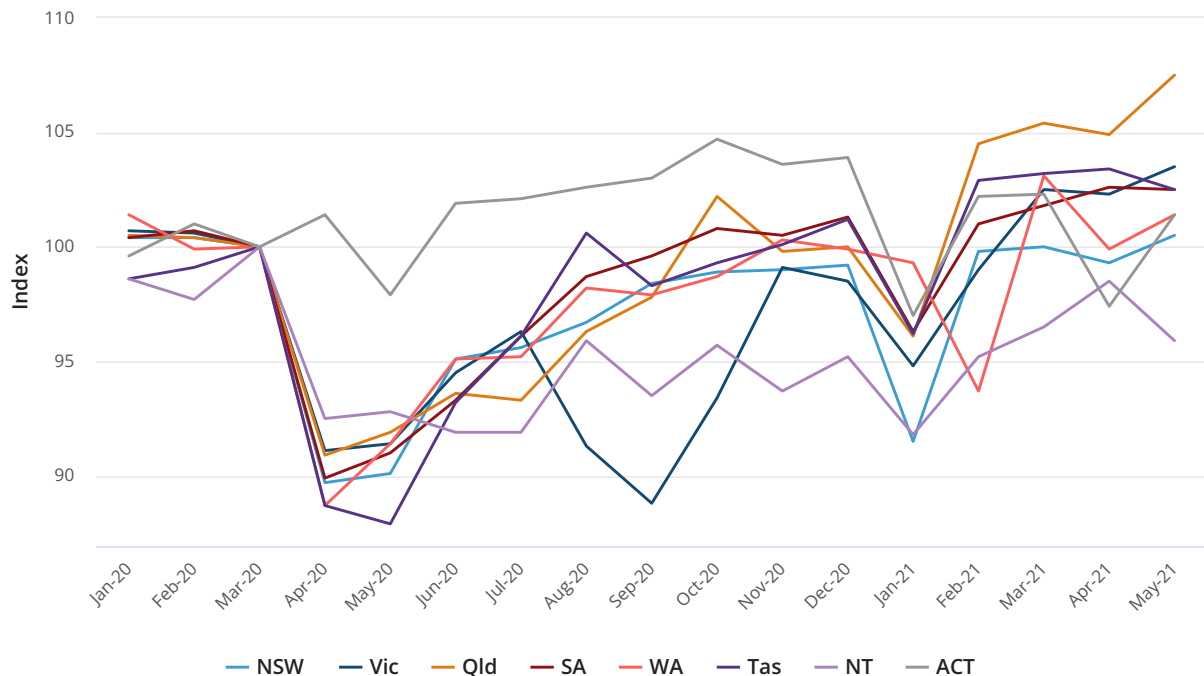
Source: Labour Force, Australia Tables 1 and 19

States and territories

Chart 3 shows the changes in hours worked in the states and territories, indexed to March 2020. Hours worked in most states and territories had recovered to the level in March 2020, just before the start of the COVID pandemic. Only the Northern Territory remained below its March 2020 level, which is consistent with the lower level of employment since March 2020.

Hours worked over the COVID period have been impacted by lockdowns and other restrictions that have been in place across the country. The lockdowns in Victoria in the second half of 2020 resulted in falls in hours worked in August and September, followed by periods of strong growth as Victoria recovered above the March 2020 level.

Chart 3: Hours worked index, States and territories, Seasonally adjusted



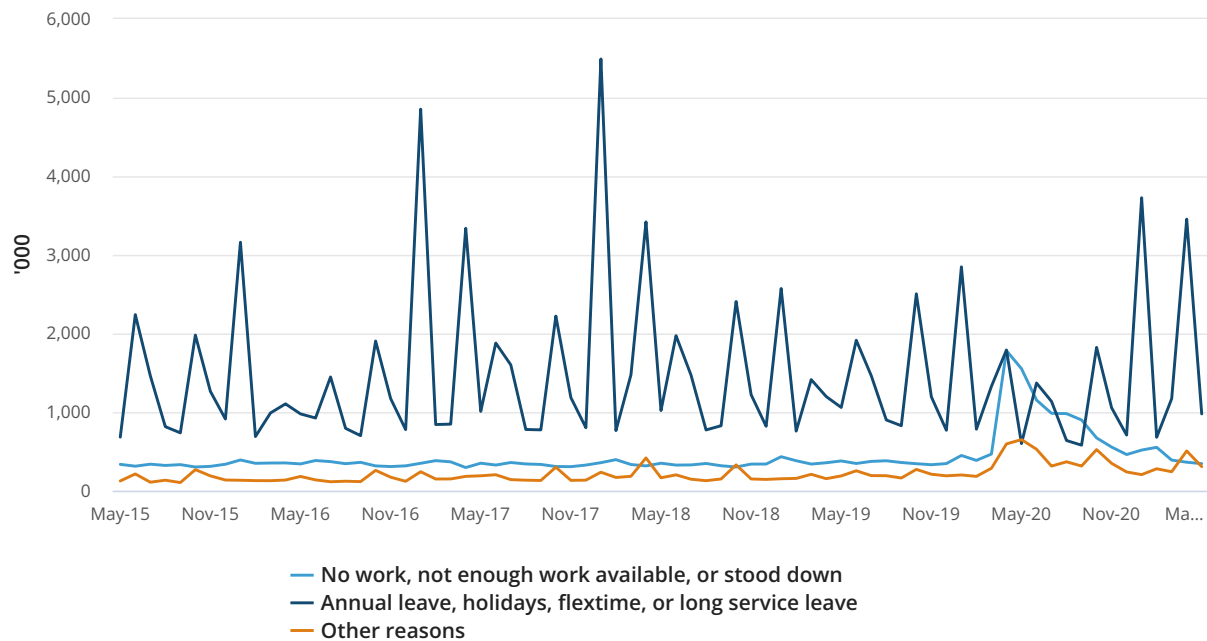
Source: Labour Force, Australia Tables 19 and 19a

People working fewer hours

Chart 4 shows the number of people working fewer (or no) hours in May 2021:

- due to taking annual leave, holidays, flextime, or long service leave - which was around 976,900 people. This followed a larger than usual number of people taking leave during the Easter public and school holidays.
- due to economic reasons - which was around 344,300 people, and around the same level before April 2020
- due to other reasons - which was around 306,600 people, and around 200,000 (39%) less than in April 2021.

Chart 4: People working fewer than their usual hours, or no hours at all,
Selected reasons, Original

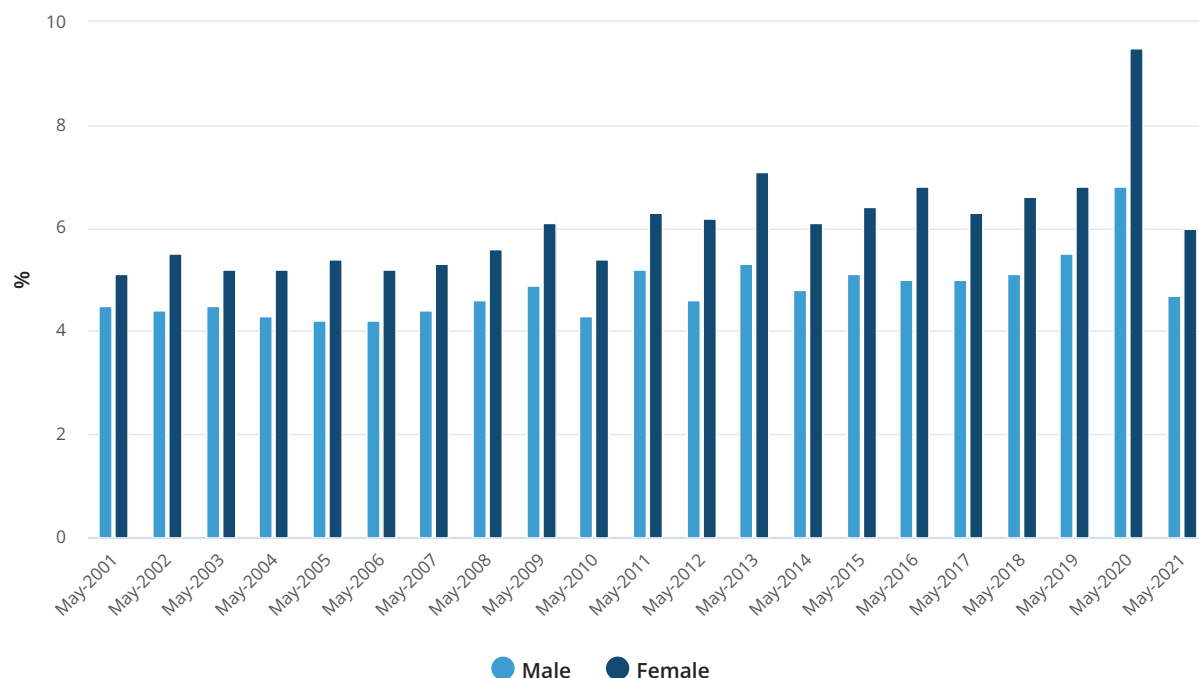


Source: Labour Force, Australia, Detailed Data Cube EM2a

People working zero hours

Chart 5 shows the proportion of employed people who worked zero hours in May over the past 20 years.

Chart 5: Proportion of employed working zero hours, Original

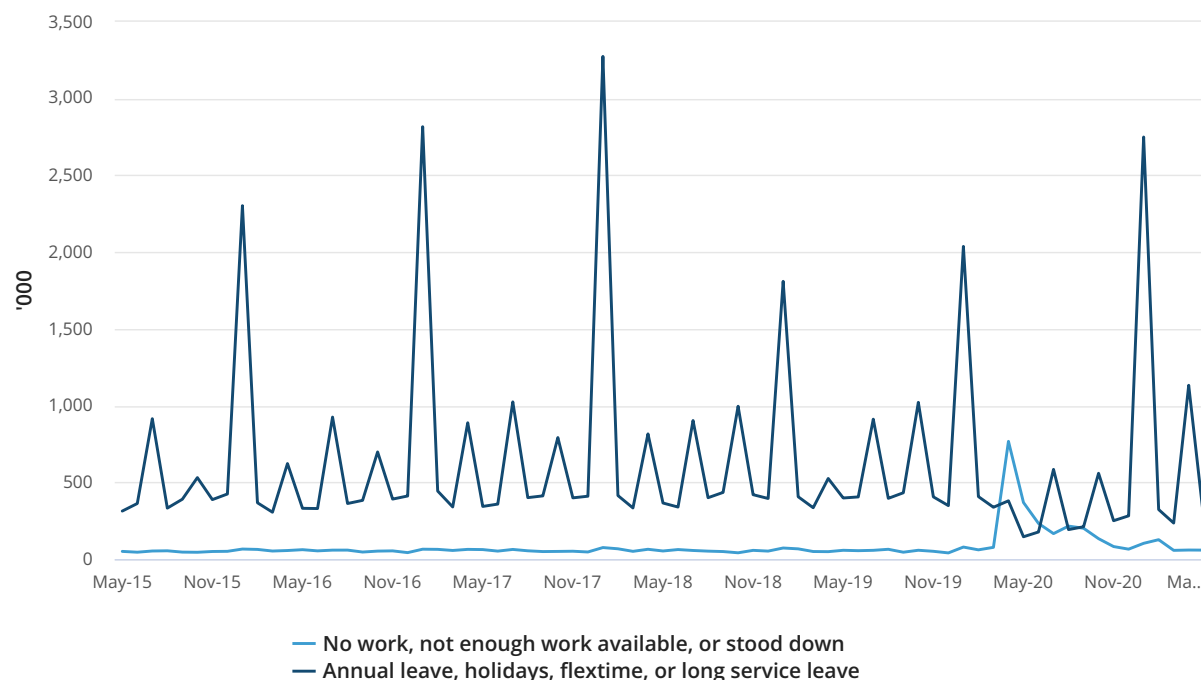


Source: Labour Force, Australia, Detailed Table 9

Chart 6 shows the number of people working zero hours for economic reasons, and due to taking annual leave, holidays, flextime, or long service leave. As with people working fewer hours, there is a distinct seasonal pattern to people taking leave, with large increases each January. In May 2021, over 262,000 employed people worked zero hours due to taking annual leave, holidays, flextime, or long service leave. This was lower than April 2021, when over 1.1 million people worked zero hours for the same reason.

The number of employed people working zero hours for economic reasons was 58,200 in May 2021, well below the peak of 766,800 in April 2020.

Chart 6: Employed people working zero hours, Selected reasons, Original



Source: Labour Force, Australia, Detailed Data Cube EM2a

Table 1 shows the number of employed people working zero hours for economic reasons in each state or territory, highlighting the very large increases in people working zero hours for economic reasons across the country in April 2020, and the second wave impacts in Victoria in August and September 2020. It also shows the effects of more recent lockdowns, including the lockdown in Western Australia in the first week of February 2021.

Table 1: Employed people working zero hours for economic reasons, by Stat

	Mar-20	Apr-20	May-20	Jun-20	Jul-20	Aug-20	Sep-20	Oct-20	Nov-20
	('000)	('000)	('000)	('000)	('000)	('000)	('000)	('000)	('000)
New South Wales	30.8	261.0	121.5	63.8	41.7	45.6	35.9	32	
Victoria	22.7	229.6	102.7	80.6	65.3	112.2	113	65.9	
Queensland	12.0	126.8	64.9	51	28.4	26.4	31.1	18.2	

	Mar-20	Apr-20	May-20	Jun-20	Jul-20	Aug-20	Sep-20	Oct-20	Nov-2
South Australia	4.5	47.9	23.7	11.6	9.6	10	8.1	5.6	
Western Australia	4.8	69.4	42.1	17.7	15.4	15.8	9.3	7.9	
Tasmania	1.4	16.9	9.2	4.6	3.8	2.7	1.6	1.8	
Northern Territory	0.3	5.1	2.3	1.3	0.8	0.5	0.5	0.4	
Australian Capital Territory	0	10	2.2	1.6	0.8	1.4	1.1	0.9	
Australia	76.4	766.8	368.5	232.2	165.8	214.7	200.7	132.8	

Source: Labour Force, Australia, Detailed Data Cube EM2b

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